

# Evangelizing the Environment: Decision Process Effects in Political Persuasion

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*In the fall of 2004, the National Association of Evangelicals produced a statement advocating more resources to combat environmental degradation and promote environmental sustainability. We assess several possible mechanisms for this opinion change using data from a survey experiment. In particular, we test for the effects of group cues, identity, and a new cue—the decision-making process—in which communicating the way a source went about making a decision can affect how other cues are utilized. In contrast to decades of research, we find that a group cue has little effect, while the process cue alters how in- and out-group members think about environmental protection and the players involved in this political drama.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2004, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an umbrella association of 53 evangelical Protestant denominations with a combined membership of about 30 million people, produced a position statement advocating more resources to combat environmental degradation and promote environmental sustainability, including addressing “the issue of global warming” (Goodstein 2005; Janofsky 2005; NAE 2004). The NAE justified the need to address global warming due to Christians’ God-given dominion over the world and their moral responsibility to be stewards of the Earth. This expanded the scope of reasons to promote environmental policy for a group essentially new to the environmental movement, from arguments based on scientific evidence to those grounded in spiritual morality. Of course, the significance of this potential movement cannot be understated. It is fair to say that the environment has not engendered much support from evangelicals in recent history (e.g., Guth et al. 1993, 1995; Sherkat and Ellison 2007) and evangelicals have been a key constituency of the Republican Party for several decades. As Guth and colleagues claimed at the end of their investigation of the theological underpinnings of environmentalism: “Both in agenda setting and policy choices, then, the religious and political perspectives of conservative Protestants are certainly a barrier to the development of environmental consciousness in large sectors of American Protestantism, despite the strong generalized support for environmental action exhibited by the American people” (1993:380). That is, a dramatic shift among evangelical Protestants to back green public policy has the potential to shake up American politics and perhaps even take environmental policy beyond partisan squabbling. As Senator Joe Lieberman noted concerning the pro-environmental shift of the NAE: “Support from the evangelical and broader religious community can really move some people in Congress who feel some sense of moral responsibility but haven’t quite settled on an exact policy response yet. This could be pivotal” (quoted in Goodstein 2005).

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Select evangelical elites have either signed on to the NAE's commitment to address global warming or have taken actions consistent with a "creation care" (pro-environmental protection) ethic. For instance, Baptist leaders were recently important players in halting the approval process for 18 coal-fired power plants in Texas (Curry 2007). Since the Southern Baptist Convention currently forbids (through a nonbinding resolution) environmental activism by its member churches, any elite, evangelical break from historical apathy or antipathy is a potentially significant step in creating an environmental consciousness for an important segment of the American electorate. To this date, however, there is still little evidence of any mass evangelical opinion shift on the environment. Thus, the key question is whether the mass evangelical public opinion might follow elite leadership on this issue. While it is beyond the scope of this article to determine whether or not this is happening or will happen, we are able to test various paths of influence that would make such an opinion shift more or less likely. More importantly, we test a new elite influence mechanism, described below, with broader implications that can provide a more informed understanding of how such changes could occur in other domains at any time.

What is particularly interesting for the study of public opinion change is that a presumably influential elite cue-giver has taken a position both contrary to past positions but also outside of an issue set that the group, as a whole, is known for concerning itself with. Moreover, the NAE's change of heart, driven by the association's government affairs director Reverend Rich Cizik, may also ruffle members' feathers and undermine group maintenance. This kind of situation seems rare in most milieus, but is relatively common within religious groups, with clergy as the primary source of "prophetic" pronouncements designed to encourage cognitive and behavioral change (Djupe and Gilbert 2002, 2003; Djupe and Neiheisel 2008). It also presents us with a particularly useful situation with which to assess elite persuasion.

In this article, we propose several mechanisms that could generate opinion change surrounding the NAE's statement and test these notions with data gathered from a survey experiment conducted not long after the NAE's announcement. We test the influence of three mechanisms concerning the source of this message: group cue, group identity, and a new one, decision-making process.

The former two are well known in the political and social psychology literature. Although most people are rarely awash in policy-specific information (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), the public is often able to rely upon group heuristics to guide its policy preferences (Conover 1988; Converse 1964; Lupia 1994; Nelson and Kinder 1996). Simply stated, a person who likes a group will express opinions consistent with that group's preferences, whereas a person who dislikes a group will simply take a position contrary to that group's policy preference (Brady and Sniderman 1985). Facing politically uncertain decisions with low information, people will turn to groups as shortcuts (Lupia 1994).

Moreover, decades of research in social psychology demonstrate the influence of one's social identity on behavior and attitudes (Sherif et al. 1961; Tajfel 1970; Tajfel and Turner 1986). These studies consistently show that categorizing people into groups, even under trivial conditions, can lead to negative treatment of the out-group and a favorable in-group bias. In turn, political scientists have found social identity theory to be a useful tool for explaining a number of political phenomena (see Monroe, Hankin, and Van Vechten 2000 for further discussion). Nonetheless, despite the prevailing consensus that groups matter in the formation of public opinion, the mechanisms that cause groups to become more or less influential remain opaque. For instance, few would dispute that information provided by an in-group leader should be persuasive, but questions remain regarding when this message would be most persuasive.

The vast literature on elite persuasion (see Fiske and Taylor 1991 for a review) has largely focused on the effects of the characteristics of the cue provider, including credibility, expertise, and demographic consonance (e.g., Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), and has generally found that more is better. However, scant attention has been paid to attributes of the information itself that is provided (though see Chong and Druckman 2007). We believe that individuals are not only

affected by the characteristics of the cue provider but also by the process that the cue provider used to reach that decision. That is, one way to assess the credibility or trustworthiness of an argument is to know on what basis the decision to back the stance was reached. For instance, to readers of this article, Mary Jones will be more persuasive when she is a professor than a labor union activist, but especially so when she grounds her argument based on the kind of rigorous, dispassionate analysis that professors value and employ. We refer to this as the consideration of a decision-making process. The recent declaration by the NAE is so important and interesting precisely because they justify their position based on a process—prayer, a sense akin to an altar call of being driven to a position, and intense reflection on biblical scripture—that heretofore has largely not been part of the rhetoric used in the global warming debate and is of particular significance to the NAE's constituency.

A few literatures have considered something like decision process and the influence of knowing about decision processes. Studies of procedural justice consistently show that the public is more likely to view a decision as legitimate and to defer to the authorities making the decision when the decision-making process is viewed as fair (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Tyler 2001, 2006). An underlying assumption of much of the work on procedural justice is that a process will be viewed as more legitimate when it is more likely to produce a "correct" decision, such as ensuring that the guilty are convicted and the innocent go free.

From another perspective, "reason giving" is of fundamental normative importance because, as one scholar has argued, "the offering of reasons for political choice is the central act of public deliberation" (Ettema 2006; see also Mendelberg and Oleske 2000). Reason giving goes beyond instrumental motives and is central to interpersonal relations, since, as Tilly argues: "Giving of reasons . . . connects people with each other" (2006:10; see also Cheng and Johnstone 2002) and "giving of reasons always says something about the relation itself" (Tilly 2006:158). Taking Tilly's insight one step farther, we believe that different groups have quite distinctive process concerns and thus a particular decision-making process can be considered a culturally scripted cue.<sup>1</sup> We already mentioned that readers of this article will likely assess our conclusions according to how well they match an exceedingly particular process—social scientific research methods. Similarly, evangelicals emphasize a distinct process for reaching decisions—a process that involves intense, personal reflection, both on the Bible and with God through prayer.<sup>2</sup> Only through this process do evangelicals trust that a decision, either their own or one made by others, is a valid one. Signaling that the decision was reached via prayer or a scriptural reference provides a cue to members that a message provider is a legitimate in-group member. Thus, decisions that are reached by the "correct" process should be particularly persuasive for in-group members. Simply stated, social identity and the decision-making process should have an interactive effect on evaluations.

The role of this decision-making process in the NAE's policy shift was well publicized. Reverend Rich Cizik was the driving force behind the historic shift and afterward was the most vocal public advocate for "creation care" from within the NAE's ranks. In initial statements, Cizik emphasized the distinctly evangelical process by which he came to be concerned about the environment. Only after a thoughtful prayer with others and reading scripture did he have a "conversion" on climate change so profound that he likened it to an "altar call."<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, this occurred in the context of a summit of religious leaders held in England to discuss

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for sharing this insight.

<sup>2</sup> A noted evangelist, Armin Gesswein (Hartley and Gesswein 2003) writes: "Prayer is not everything, but everything is by prayer." Chadwick, in his *The Path of Prayer* (2001), makes the point clearly: "There is nothing about which I do not pray. I go over all my life in the presence of God. All my problems are solved there."

<sup>3</sup> An altar call occurs in select evangelical churches, often at the end of a sermon, and can be a powerful, moving event. People are called to come forward to the altar to confess their sins and affirm or reaffirm Jesus Christ as their savior.

faith and environmental policy (Goodstein 2005). While Cizik could have articulated a scientific or deliberative process, he emphasized a uniquely evangelical one surely because of its presumed effect on his intended audience.

Examples of this strategy abound when communicating largely to evangelicals. In preparing for her bid for the U.S. Senate in 2006, Katherine Harris, former Florida Secretary of State during the 2000 election, noted that she would “prayerfully prepare with my family, friends and advisers to finalize the strategy for a major announcement next week concerning my candidacy for the U.S. Senate” (Goodnough 2006). Periodic articles describe how President George Bush used such a process language to back his aims (Kirkpatrick 2004; see also Calfano and Djupe 2009; Kuo 2006), such as elevating Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court (Kirkpatrick 2005). It may even act independently of political consonance. For example, Andy Crouch, an editor at the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, told the *New York Times*: “The person I just hear about all the time is Obama because he is seen as *spiritually serious*, even if people know he’s really kind of a liberal Christian” (Luo and Goodstein 2007, emphasis added).

The same factors that make a message more persuasive for in-group members may simultaneously weaken the persuasiveness of the message for out-group members (nonevangelicals). If the decision-making process highlights the legitimacy of the message for in-group members, then out-group members may conversely see the information as more illegitimate because the process highlights that the message source comes from an out-group member. So, even if the person agrees with the end policy stance, acknowledgment of that agreement may be tempered if the decision is reached through a suspect, out-group process. If true, this provides a general mechanism for the oft-noted tensions when attempting to create alliances across social groups (e.g., Jelen 1991). In this case, this means that nonevangelicals would become less supportive of the need to address global warming when learning of Rev. Cizik’s calling from God.

It is also possible, however, that individuals will be more responsive to out-group cues when the out-group process is congruent with out-group expectations. That is, nonevangelicals may perceive Rev. Cizik’s stance as more sincere precisely because it is justified in language that one would expect a man of a particular cloth to utilize. From this perspective, we would expect nonevangelicals to be more responsive to the need to address global warming when learning of Rev. Cizik’s calling from God.

### Message Processing Concerns

One other perspective may bear on the question of how Cizik’s cues and message may be received and offer more nuanced expectations. This perspective involves not just who the people involved are, but how hard they are induced to think. In part, we are attempting to disentangle the typical way a group cue is thought to work, rooted in the distinction between heuristic and systematic information processing (see, e.g., Chaiken 1980; Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 1989; see also Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Heuristic processing is automatic, in which noncontent cues, such as the source’s identity, constitute simple decision rules to assess whether a message is valid. Systematic processing, on the other hand, entails considerable thought about the content of the message, leading people to overlook simple cues (though see Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994). Elite influence outside of psychology has primarily been understood to function at the heuristic level since it is assumed that most people are cognitive misers (Downs 1957). As Mondak (1993:167) explains: “[A]pplication of heuristic processing to source cues—references to prominent political leaders—can allow individuals to extend evaluations of those leaders to the policies and issues with which they are associated.” This construction combines a number of assumptions and allows an intermingling of policy agreement and evaluation of the elite that is difficult to parse out. That is, group cues attached to group leaders actually require significant amounts of knowledge, some of which appears to be endogenous—some level of group affinity, the attachment of a leader to the group, and where the leader presumably stands. As Converse

noted, in order to use group cues, citizens must “be endowed with some cognitions of the group as an entity and with some interstitial ‘linking’ information indicating why a given party or policy is relevant to the group. Neither of these forms of information can be taken for granted” (1964:236–37).

In this study we present an evangelical leader taking a pro-environmental stance when such a leader stereotypically would not address environmental issues and would most likely take a stance against more environmental protection (Guth et al. 1993, 1995). Message recipients are thus cast adrift from traditional moorings—the stereotype that evangelicals are opposed to environmental protection and avoid the issue. A crucial insight to help build expectations for how people respond in such a situation is that incongruent information can lead to systematic processing (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). That is, people can still be induced to think with effort when the available cues are insufficient to give confidence in a judgment (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991:14–15).

Because the information Rev. Cizik provides to evangelicals is both novel and dissonant, evangelicals cannot rely on existing stereotypes and are therefore led to consider Cizik’s message. Since it is incongruent with expectations, they will look for additional information, such as his decision-making process, that would confirm the credibility of the message. Therefore, his identification as an evangelical tied to a specifically evangelical decision-making process should encourage adoption of his incongruent message. Absent confirmatory process information, we suspect that evangelicals will remain wary of his message and remain resistant to change. Among nonevangelicals with nothing about their group identity at risk and hence less motivation to process systematically, we expect that message processing effort will depend on how important the issue is to them (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). A high level of importance should lead recipients to overlook the experimental cues and focus on the content. Low levels of importance should foster heuristic processing where the evangelical source cue should lead to lower support and the addition of the process cue should work as a credibility cue and lead to adoption.

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

To test the above relationships, we employed a 2 × 2 factorial design experiment. First, we manipulate exposure to the source cue. Specifically, half of the respondents learn that Reverend Rich Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has urged the government to address environmental issues, whereas the other half are not told Cizik is a reverend nor connected to the NAE. Second, we manipulate information about the process that led to this decision—namely, half of the respondents are informed that the decision is the result of thoughtful prayer, while the other half are not told about the process that led to the decision. With both source (*italicized text*) and process cues (**bold-faced text**) present, the statement reads as follows.

Recently, Reverend Rich Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for *the National Association of Evangelicals, a group composed of 53 evangelical Protestant denominations with a combined membership of about 30 million people, stated that after thoughtful prayer with others and reading Scripture he had a “conversion” on climate change so profound that he likened it to an “altar call.” As a result, he* urged the “government to encourage fuel efficiency, reduce pollution, encourage sustainable use of natural resources, and provide for the proper care of wildlife and their natural habitats in order to address the issue of global warming.”

The 948 respondents were part of Knowledge Networks survey panel, surveyed May 26–31, 2006.<sup>4</sup> The grant-funded study was limited to 8,000 respondent questions. In order to maximize

<sup>4</sup> The response rate for the both the general population and the oversample was 68 percent and the proportion that qualified for inclusion from the oversample was 79 percent. Of the total sample of 948, 587 came from the general population component and 361 from the oversample. Knowledge Networks reported the AAPOR RR3 as 30.2 percent.

the number of cases per condition cell, we were thus limited to a handful of questions. Moreover, to gain sufficient numbers of evangelicals to analyze, we included an oversample of Protestants, from which we selected evangelicals. Respondents were presented with one of four variations of the statement above, where the amount of information presented to respondents constitutes the manipulation for our study. The above statement served as the introduction to a question about their position on global warming—"At this point, we would like to get your thoughts on this issue. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The U.S. government needs to do more to address the issue of global warming." We then proceeded to ask questions tapping the importance of global warming, evangelical and environmental identities and affects, religious affiliations and involvement, and partisan affiliation (see the Appendix for specific question wording; descriptive statistics for the variables employed are available in Table A in the Appendix).

## RESULTS

Individual attitudes related to the issue of global warming are analyzed with ANOVA. As our theory predicts that the effects of source and process cues will vary depending in part on one's group identity, we examine the responses of in-groups and out-groups individually. Specifically, we compare the influence of these cues for, first, environmentalists versus nonenvironmentalists and, second, evangelical Christians versus nonevangelical Christians. These divisions are created via each respondent's own subjective identification with the group; thus, individuals are coded as a group member when they see themselves as a part of that group. We look for the effects of source and process cues on two dependent variables—on the need to address global warming (direct effect) and feelings toward evangelicals using a standard feeling thermometer (indirect effect). In each model, we control for partisanship, education levels, age, and gender.

The ANOVA results for the need to address global warming among environmentalists and nonenvironmentalists are presented in Table 1. We begin with this division of respondents since there was a broader audience for Cizik's message than simply evangelicals and our theory has both in- and out-group implications. Neither process nor source information by themselves exerts a significant influence for nonenvironmentalists, but both do for environmentalists. The interaction of the two variables, however, is significant for both nonenvironmentalists and environmentalists (both  $p < .02$ ). In Figure 1, the line color denotes the group (black = nonenvironmentalists), the line style shows the presence of the source cue (dashed = not present), and the movement on the  $x$  axis shows the effect from the application of the process cue. For both groups the process

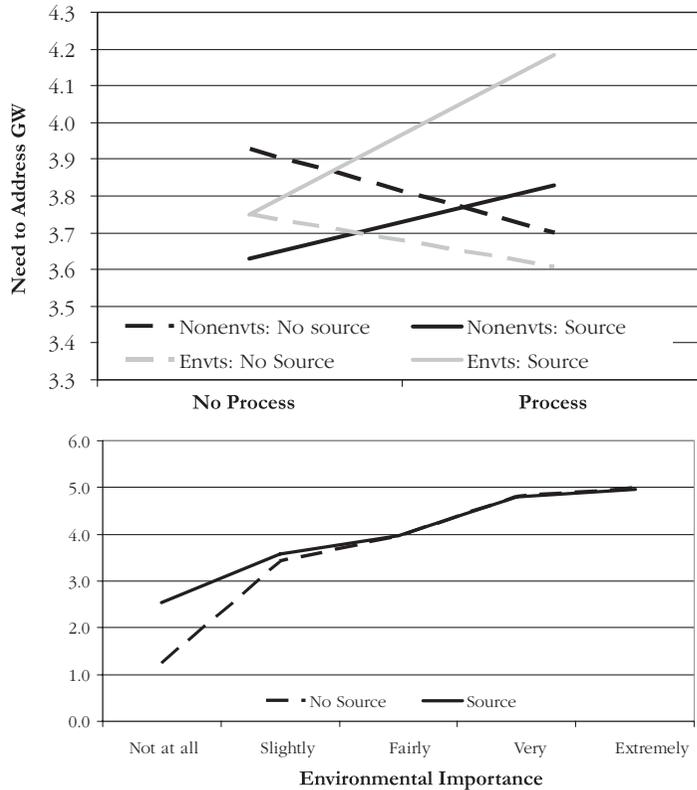
Table 1: ANOVA for need to address global warming opinion: nonenvironmentalists versus environmentalists

	Nonenvironmentalists		Environmentalists	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Source	.986	.321	8.347	.004
Process	.040	.842	2.200	.139
Importance	140.016	.000	104.445	.000
Source * Process	6.569	.011	8.426	.004
Source * Importance	1.784	.131	2.451	.045
Process * Importance	.940	.440	1.165	.325
Source * Process * Importance	.994	.410	1.710	.147
<i>N</i>	487		454	

*Note:* Controls were included for partisan affiliation, gender, age, and education.

Figure 1

Need to address global warming: environmentalists versus nonenvironmentalists—source × process interaction; environmentalists: source × importance interaction



cue in isolation tends to have a negative effect on the need to address global warming, moving both groups at least .15 points lower in support (on a 1–5 scale). The evangelical source cue in isolation only has an effect for nonenvironmentalists whose support for global warming is roughly .3 lower than among those without a source cue. But, the source cue in isolation engenders less support than when it is paired with the process cue. The largest shift can be seen when the process cue is presented along with the source to environmentalists, who then increase their support for addressing global warming by about .5 points (but nonenvironmentalists also show an increase of about .2 points). In other words, merely presenting the source as an evangelical may not lead to a decline in support for a policy, but adding process cues native to a group helps to establish the credibility of the cue-giver and engenders greater support.

We also found that the source cue had an interactive effect with environmental importance among environmentalists, the results of which are presented in the bottom panel of Figure 1. We expect that those rating environmental problems to be personally important are more resistant to supplied cues because they are more likely to process systematically, while those with a low sense of issue importance should be more susceptible to change (Krosnick 1990; Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991).<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, higher importance leads to greater support for the need to address global warming. The source cue has no effect on those with higher levels of support, but does for those who find the issue less important—a strange group to find among self-described

<sup>5</sup> The experimental manipulations had no effect on how important subjects viewed the issue; thus, importance is exogenous to the other factors in the model.

Table 2: ANOVA for need to address global warming opinion: nonevangelicals versus evangelicals

	Evangelicals		Nonevangelicals	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Source	.263	.609	.591	.442
Process	.645	.423	.929	.335
Importance	65.202	.000	136.019	.000
Source * Process	2.909	.089	11.763	.001
Source * Importance	.526	.717	1.151	.332
Process * Importance	.396	.812	.666	.616
Source * Process * Importance	.319	.865	2.219	.065
<i>N</i>	278		658	

*Note:* Controls were included for partisan affiliation, gender, age, and education.

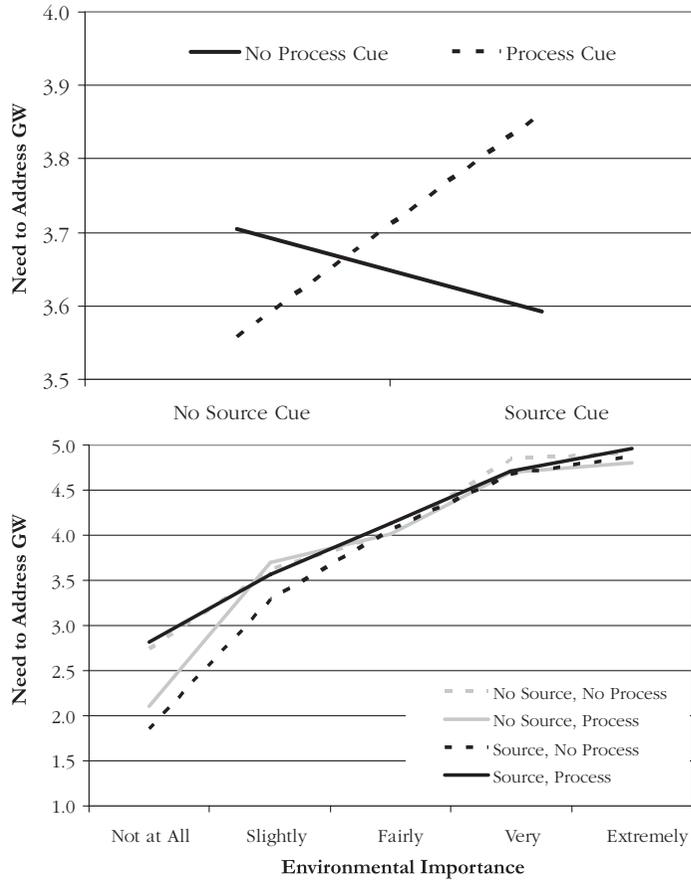
environmentalists. For them, receiving the source cue elevates support for addressing global warming.

These results bear on the scope of the legion tensions between environmentalists and evangelicals from at least one perspective. Religious leaders have complained about the secular and sometimes anti-religious language employed by the environmental movement, which the movement has admitted at times (e.g., Johnson 1998). On the other hand, the conservative religious community has been slow to embrace “creation care” or has been continually hostile to the environmental movement—the late Reverend Jerry Falwell suggested that global warming was a ploy by Satan to turn people toward environmentalism and away from evangelism (Cooperman 2007). The negative impact of the evangelical source cue suggests that there is something to this story. Either Falwell and others may have successfully generated a useful heuristic (evangelicals are opposed to environmentalism and whatever evangelicals are for, nonevangelicals are against), or that the environmental movement has been too secular for so long that evangelicals will have no truck with a secular cause. Use of the heuristic, without supplementary information that would confirm the source’s sincerity, is not confined to environmentalists, however, but extends to the rest of the public. That the effect of the evangelical source cue is limited to low importance environmentalists does suggest, however, that the movement appears willing to embrace a broader coalition.

Next, we examine the impact of this information based on one’s identification as an evangelical Christian—the group we would expect to be most affected by this information. The ANOVA results are shown in Table 2. Among evangelicals, we find that the interaction of source and process information affects support for the need to address global warming, the results of which are presented in the top panel of Figure 2. By themselves, receiving either the source or process cue leads to *lower* support for addressing global warming. But, when receiving both together (e.g., Mr. Cizik is an evangelical who has engaged in thoughtful prayer with others), evangelicals *increase* their support for addressing global warming. This is a direct confirmation of our theory.

We also find a significant impact for these cues among out-group members. While the process and source cue manipulations do not exert a significant impact on global warming attitudes, the interaction of these two cues with environmental importance is significant ( $p = .065$ ). Looking at the bottom panel of Figure 2, source and process information affects support for the need to address global warming among those who see environmental issues as less important. There, receiving just the source or process cue drops support for addressing global warming (solid gray and dashed black lines). On the other hand, those receiving no cues or both source and process cues together evidence higher support, telling us the same basic story as the results among evangelicals.

Figure 2  
 Need to address global warming: evangelicals—source × process interaction;  
 nonevangelicals—source × process × importance interaction



Finally, as a means of testing the possible indirect impact of source and process information on attitudes, we examine whether or not this information influenced feeling thermometer scores for evangelical Christians. That is, while the source and process information connected to Mr. Cizik may increase support among evangelicals, it may also have changed assessments of evangelicals more generally. As we did above, we present the results for both nonevangelicals and evangelicals separately; these results are presented in Table 3.

Among nonevangelicals, we only find effects from the source cue and from environmental importance. Specifically, nonevangelical subjects who see global warming as important have a lower assessment of evangelicals than do those who do not see the issue as important (roughly 36 vs. 42) and those given the evangelical source cue rate evangelicals *higher* by about four points. Those viewing global warming as important are more likely to know the traditional stance of evangelicals on this issue—opposed to action—which cools feelings toward them. This provides some additional validation that heuristics are not able to be employed by everyone; issue importance is a powerful glue to link issue-relevant information to a symbol (group or elite) (e.g., Krosnick 1989). At the same time, those given the source cue tied to a pro-environmental stance like what they hear and feel warmer toward evangelicals, which suggests that these respondents thought systematically about the combination of message and cue.

Among evangelicals, we find that the source cue is significant ( $p < .05$ ). When evangelicals are presented with source information only, their assessment of evangelicals *drops* by six points

Table 3: ANOVA for evangelical feeling thermometer: nonevangelicals versus evangelicals

	Nonevangelicals		Evangelicals	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Source	3.160	.076	3.621	.058
Process	1.356	.245	.099	.753
Importance	4.835	.001	1.348	.253
Source * Process	.168	.682	.458	.499
Source * Importance	1.658	.158	1.690	.153
Process * Importance	.374	.827	.594	.667
Source * Process * Importance	.773	.543	.222	.926
<i>N</i>	658		277	

*Note:* Controls were included for partisan affiliation, gender, age, and education.

(from roughly 74–67°). While the source–process interaction boosted support for addressing global warming, it has no effect on feelings toward evangelicals. Instead, the source–importance interaction is statistically marginal, hinting that the negative impact of source information is concentrated among those evangelicals who see the issue as unimportant. This may not be as damning as it might seem since evangelicals see environmental problems as just as important as do nonevangelicals (Sherkat and Ellison 2007; though our data suggest a significant 10 percent difference in mean importance with evangelicals on the low end).

While issue importance has been commonly employed as a moderator variable, here it is surely not independent of the attitude. That is, evangelicals who view global warming as unimportant are more than likely making a theological statement that environmental concerns are beneath them and detract from core concerns. They may not agree with Falwell that environmental causes are a Satanic ploy, but many evangelicals have firm commitments about the composition of their agenda. Thus, counter to the social identity model, when they encounter presumably in-group members embracing environmental causes they think systematically and distance themselves from them. The wolf is to be feared, but less so than the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we took advantage of a historic opportunity of a potential sea change in public opinion. Evangelical leaders have shown signs of broadening their public agenda to include environmental protection, including attempts to slow global warming. The NAE’s decision to push for environmental protection was one of the more acknowledged examples of this shift. Those supportive of the environmental movement have heralded the recent statements by evangelical leaders, such as Reverend Cizik, and our results show why. The most religious argumentation Cizik offers does not produce a wholesale decline in support for government action on global warming or feelings toward evangelicals, which signals a population willing to accept a wide variety of justifications for environmentalism. Evangelicals (i.e., in-group members) are, at worst, less enamored with their in-group brethren who do not conform to their expected stances. But, evangelicals show greater support for this game-changing stance when they can assess the credibility of the opinion leader by seeing a trusted decision-making process.

Thus, our results indicate that environmentalism can indeed become mainstream within the evangelical community, though not without some initial tension. Through anecdotal reports in the media, it seems that more evangelical clergy are addressing environmental issues in ways that are not typically tied to the environmental movement, but with justifications that are uniquely

evangelical. These efforts seem like they will produce the desired changes. However, our results also suggest that there is a portion of the evangelical community that may be resistant to these efforts—those who deny the importance of environmental problems and those who only receive a sound bite from evangelical leaders on the issue, not to mention those who receive messages directly antagonistic to a pro-environmental message. As pro-environmental stances are more often taken in authentic ways in local religious communities, we should see environmentalism grow within evangelicalism, which in turn should usher in a sea change in politics on the issue.

By drawing upon this important shift in group behavior and, more importantly, upon a new form of decision-making rhetoric, we were able to test the effects of conveying a decision-making process. People tend to look to heuristics when a stance a group is known to support is connected to the group. When that connection is broken, as is true in the case of the NAE statement, a simple group cue is insufficient to trigger attitude change among in-group members. Among out-group members, the source cue works according to the heuristic processing model in a somewhat unexpected way—weakening support on a policy evangelicals are not known to take positions on and just among those finding global warming unimportant—thereby adding a coda to Kuklinski and Hurley's (1994) "cautionary tales" of common heuristics working against a group's interests.

But in the face of decades of research promoting group cues, we find that process information makes a significant contribution to understanding opinion shifts. Process cues native to evangelicals explicitly tied to evangelical identification of the source help in-group members change their attitudes to synchronize with new arguments, as a modified dual-route processing model would predict (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). Moreover, process cues signal to out-group members that the arguments are credible and mitigate the negative effects on global warming support that an evangelical group identification entails. In accord with a long line of investigation (Boninger et al. 1995; Krosnick 1989, 1990), it is not surprising to find that these effects are moderated by the degree of import the respondent attaches to the issue. Those rating an issue as more important think systematically and remain unaffected by source or process cues, but those rating it unimportant are vulnerable to the availability of cues (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). Future research might build on this perspective, inquiring whether the addition of process cues augments the likelihood that a recipient would remember the position (boosting accessibility) and would be willing to assess its worth in discussion. Moreover, there may be an altogether different effect of process cues depending on whether the argument is largely consonant with the recipient's stance. Further, there is work to be done in assessing the effect of process on the perceived trustworthiness of a source.

Our results are quite heartening for the environmental movement. Only the smallest contingent of movement identifiers, those who say global warming is not important, are affected by the group affiliation of a controversial supporter. Thus, one might reasonably conclude that the environmental movement is open to fellow travelers who arrive at their opinions in far different ways. Moreover, when environmental stances are justified in familiar terms, support grows from a group (evangelicals) with once anemic environmentalism.

The results are heartening in another way—the public appears skeptical of new ideas from unexpected sources without evidence of credibility. Evangelicals have a history of opposing green initiatives and at least some portion of the public seems aware of this. On the other side, evangelicals seem at least initially skeptical of new wine in old wineskins without confirming evidence. This provides an important counter argument for those who believe that the American public can be blown here and there with a carefully chosen word gleaned by pollsters or a carefully constructed narrative (e.g., Lakoff 2008). There is no doubt that language matters, but it appears that the public can make meaningful use of simple substantive information when provided. The cues provided in this study were not complex, but nor were they superficial, and yet we see the public respond in ways that are meaningful and substantive.

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## APPENDIX

Table A: Descriptive statistics of variables employed

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Government should do more to address global warming	1	5	4.03	1.105
Evangelical feeling thermometer	5	100	48.77	26.787
Importance of addressing global warming	1	5	3.17	1.170
Party affiliation	1	3	2.01	.974
Female	0	1	.53	.500
Age	2	8	5.21	1.727
Education	1	4	2.73	1.018
White evangelical	0	1	.22	.413

*N* = 948.

Table B: Questionnaire items and measurement

	Item	Categories
<i>Need to address global warming</i>	At this point, we would like to get your thoughts on this issue. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The U.S. government needs to do more to address the issue of global warming.	Strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5)
<i>Feelings toward evangelicals</i>	We'd like to get your feelings toward some groups who are in the news these days using something called a feeling thermometer. You can choose any number between 0 and 100. The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward that group; the lower the number, the colder or less favorable. You would rate a group at the 50° mark if you feel neither warm nor cold toward them. How would you rate evangelical Protestants?	0–100 with 100 most favorable, 0 less favorable
<i>Environmentalists</i>	Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I consider myself an environmentalist.	Strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5)
<i>Evangelical</i>	If the respondent reported being a "Protestant" or "Some other Christian" and then strongly or somewhat agreed that "I would describe myself as a "born again" or evangelical Christian."	Evangelical (1), nonevangelical (2)
<i>Environmental importance</i>	How important is the issue of global warming for you personally?	Not at all important (1) to extremely important (5)
<i>Party affiliation</i>	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a . . .	Republican (1), other (2), Democrat (3)

*Note:* Age was coded in the following categories: 18–24, 3 = 25–34, 4 = 35–44, 5 = 45–54, 6 = 55–64, 7 = 65–74, 8 = 75, and over. *Education* was coded as 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = bachelor's degree or more. *Gender* was coded 1 = male, 2 = female.